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Africa Review

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Ethiopia: Intensified Political Maneuvering

Behind-the-scenes political maneuvering in Ethiopia appears to be intensifying. Activity seems to center on a dispute between Chairman Mengistu and one of the semi-legitimate Marxist-Leninist parties, which has become alarmed by its expected loss of influence. The US Embassy believes that the party's sympathizers in the Army may have been at least partly responsible for recent attempts to disrupt the war effort in Eritrea. Mengistu is using an alleged coup plot by the dissident party--possibly with pro-Soviet allies in the ruling council--to eliminate opponents. Mengistu's grip on power does not appear to be threatened, but the apparent link between military and civilian antiregime elements could pose problems for him in the future.

The power struggle evidently began in August when leaders of Wez Ader (the Proletarian League), the strongest of several Marxist-Leninist parties tolerated by the government, became upset over Mengistu's reported plan to make his own party, Seded (the Revolutionary Flame), the vanguard of a new, single political party that would give his regime at least the appearance of civilian rule. Wez Ader sympathizers in the country's governing Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) allegedly began to plot a coup to thwart Mengistu's plan, but they were foiled while still in the planning stage.

In late September, the government arrested approximately 15 Wez Ader members, including three close associates of prominent PMAC member Lt. Legesse Asfaw. According to unconfirmed reports, Legesse has been executed, or is about to be, in connection with the alleged Wez Ader plot. There are unconfirmed reports that PMAC Secretary General Fikre-Selassie Wogderess may also have been involved in the Wez Ader plot. He has not been seen publicly since 20 September, when the Soviet delegation to the celebrations marking the fourth anniversary of the Ethiopian revolution left the country. Legesse and Fikre-Selassie are reported to be more pro-Soviet and less

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nationalist than Mengistu and his followers, and Mengistu may have taken the occasion of the alleged Wez Ader plot to get rid of them.

Mengistu has not yet gone ahead with the formation of a single new party, which had originally been pressed on him by his Soviet and Cuban allies. With his own party, Seded, not yet firmly established, Mengistu probably will not implement the one-party concept until he is sure of his control over the political process.

According to one report, Wez Ader plotting may have extended to attempts to disrupt the war effort in Eritrea. The US Embassy believes that Wez Ader sympathizers in the Army's 2nd Division may have been at least partly responsible for a number of problems the government has recently experienced in Eritrea:

- The slowdown of the military offensive.
- The refusal to fight by over three dozen 2nd Division officers, who were subsequently executed.
- The possible sabotage of the government's arsenal at the former US facility at Kagnew Station in Asmara.

The apparent link between military and civilian anti-regime elements could pose problems for Mengistu in the future. Wez Ader has considerable support among urban workers and is attempting to broaden its following in the Army and the militia. Mengistu, however, does not seem seriously threatened. The Ethiopian leader, who has ruthlessly eliminated opponents and survived numerous challenges to his authority, still appears to dominate the PMAC and to maintain the support of key elements in the military.

The government is reportedly taking steps to intimidate or silence other civilian opponents of the regime. In anticipation of urban dweller association elections in Addis Ababa in November, the government, with the aid of a Seded-dominated goon squad, has begun to move against members and sympathizers of Meison, another Marxist-Leninist group which was all but destroyed through purges

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and arrests last year because Mengistu concluded it posed a threat to him and his party. The government has also begun a campaign against suspected Meison members in the isolated, backward, and extremely poor Welega administrative region west of the capital.

This week Mengistu even further moved to tighten his control over the government by making 16 new appointments, including three of cabinet rank. The appointees are reportedly politically reliable members of Mengistu's faction of Seded. (SECRET NOFORN-NOCONTRACT-ORCON)

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FOR THE RECORD

GHANA: In another step in Ghana's move toward civilian rule scheduled for next July, the military government led by General Akuffo announced last month that local district council elections will take place on 17 November. These are the first elections to be held in Ghana since 1969. Under the military's plan, political parties will play no role in either the local elections or the new transitional civilian government. Over the objections of civilians, the military has decided that parties would lead to divisiveness and must therefore be banned.

The new government, during the four years of its tenure, is expected to work out a permanent government structure for Ghana. A constituent assembly will convene in November to review a draft constitution prepared by a constitutional drafting commission. Meanwhile, military personnel in top governmental positions are being gradually replaced by qualified civilians. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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SEYCHELLES: Former President James Mancham--deposed in 1977--claims that he dispatched a group of confidants to Mahe, the Seychelles' capital, last month to investigate whether a mercenary-led invasion could topple the successor regime of leftist President France Albert Rene without considerable bloodshed.

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Mancham hopes that his investigators will uncover a sufficient number of disgruntled locals to support an attempt to return him to control.

Rene, who fanatically fears Mancham intends to mount a coup, has built up the island's security forces since assuming power and has forbidden political activity by Mancham's political party, the Seychelles Democratic Party. Rene is probably concerned now that Bob Denard and his mercenary band are no longer employed in the Comoros and are available for further adventures, but he is still confident that his security forces are capable of protecting the Seychelles.

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Mancham, who enjoyed the perquisites of the presidency, still has considerable support on the islands and would almost certainly be eager to return to power should the opportunity present itself. We have no confirmation, however, that Mancham is actively plotting against Rene. In any event, Mancham appears to have little appetite for the considerable bloodshed that probably would be necessary to bring down the Rene government. Mancham's response [REDACTED] may have been designed to retain the support of his followers on the islands in the hope that Seychellois unhappiness with the more authoritarian Rene regime may eventually become sufficient to facilitate the former President's return to power. (SECRET NOFORN-NOCONTRACT-ORCON) [REDACTED]

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